



International Journal of *Chemical Studies*

P-ISSN: 2349-8528

E-ISSN: 2321-4902

IJCS 2019; SP6: 556-559

Suborna Roy Choudhury

Department of Agronomy, Bihar
Agricultural University, Sabour,
Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

Sanjeev Kumar Gupta

Department of Agronomy, Bihar
Agricultural University, Sabour,
Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

Kanhaiya Lal

Department of Agronomy, Bihar
Agricultural University, Sabour,
Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

(Special Issue -6)
3rd National Conference
On

**PROMOTING & REINVIGORATING AGRI-HORTI,
TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS
[PRAGATI-2019]
(14-15 December, 2019)**

Gender disparity in wage distribution under Indian agricultural scenarios

Suborna Roy Choudhury, Sanjeev Kumar Gupta and Kanhaiya Lal

Abstract

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Agriculture sector employs 4/5th of all economically active women in the country. 48% of India's self-employed farmers are women. Women's dependence on agricultural wage labour as a source of income has also increased in the regions with the destruction of many household based industries employing mainly women. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural households. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

Keywords: agriculture, gender disparity, India, wage

Introduction

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fisheries, etc. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved. Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under developed countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more towards agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged. Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or

Corresponding Author:

Suborna Roy Choudhury
Department of Agronomy, Bihar
Agricultural University, Sabour,
Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programmes are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization, for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men's responsibility, leaving women's burdens unrelieved or even increased. Considering their dual responsibilities within and outside the home, it would be in the fitness of things that more and more in the village training is organized for rural farm women to suit their convenience with due realization that institutional training is important in its own place. In order that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is to induct a sizeable number of well trained women personnel in training and extension programmes of agricultural development agencies at all levels and more so at the grass-root level.

Scenario of women labourers in Indian agriculture

Majority of the women labourers (83.4%) were found to be in the age group of 35-54 years. About 80 per cent of the women labourers were married and 12.5 per cent were widows. The rest were either unmarried or separated from their spouse. More than 50 per cent of the labourers had primary level of education. Only 19.2 percent labourers were illiterate. About 76.7 per cent of the women labourers belonged to nuclear family. The average family size of the sample labour households was 4.54 members. Among the women labourers 85 per cent belonged to backward caste category and 15 per cent belonged to scheduled caste category. Among the women labourers 97.5 per cent women had agriculture labour as their main occupation. The rest of them did both farming and labour activities. Majority of the labourers (97.5%) worked as casual labour. The rest of them worked as cultivators and as casual labour. The women labourers were mostly involved in activities requiring no skill. The women labourers had participation in labour unions and religious unions. Some Labourers also had membership in SHGs, cooperative society, labour welfare boards etc.

The Role of Women in Agriculture and its Allied Fields

Rural women performs numerous labour intensive jobs such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fibre. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Because of the increasing population pressure, over grazing and desertification, women face difficulties in searching of fire wood. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural areas. Like collection of wood, fetching water from remote areas is also the duty of women. Because a rural woman is responsible for farm activities, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women. Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. The majority of farms own some livestock. The pattern of livestock strength is mainly influenced by various factors such as farm size, cropping pattern, availability of range-lands including fodder and pasture. It is common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animal, sheds, watering

and milking the animals. Rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also brings additional income to poor families. Evidently, rural women are involved in almost all livestock related activities. Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by females. Majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collection of farm yard manure. Males, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Every year, income from poultry farming has been rising. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs and poultry meat and left nothing for personal use. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins most of women have got a very poor health. Most of women suffer from malnutrition. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition-bounded, therefore their productive capacities are also low, and counted as unskilled labour. Though rural women also help to produce the staple crops like rice, wheat, and maize, but her contribution is secondary in staple crop production, however, in legumes and vegetables, her role is instrumental. Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at dusk. The daily routine work begins from house cleaning, fetching drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food, for family, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. Furthermore, women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies. In most of the developing countries, both men and women farmers do not have access to adequate resources, but women's are even more constrained because of cultural, traditional and sociological factors.

Constrains of farm women

The problems of women in agriculture are more acute and distressing manner. When addressed in a women-centric manner, the potential for increased productivity, restoration of ecological balance, for high positive social impacts like increased status, self-confidence and food security for communities which all are increased much more tangibly than working in a gender-neutral manner. The problems relate to land ownership, security of tenure, land quality issues in cases where land ownership is assured, and finally, land management issues in agriculture and the support systems are required. Any changes in land ownership and agricultural patterns affect women far more than men (positive or negative), given the existing gender roles that women are expected to fulfil, mainly related to management of the household in their reproductive roles – fuelwood collection, fodder collection, livestock tending in general, food security needs and so on. Women are equally working with men in agriculture but still there is wage difference between male and female for the same type of work.

Wage discrepancy between men and women labour

The estimates for changes in the last 5-7 years show declines in employment ranging from 20 per cent to as much as 77 per cent. Employment in agriculture is thus available for fewer days per year. It is therefore becoming essential for men to migrate in search of better-paid work. Women are filling this

vacuum. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own village under very bad conditions because they cannot migrate as easily as men. The dependence of women's labour on family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting has become very common. About 15 years ago, agricultural work was considered acceptable for poor tribal women. Now a days, Muslim women go out to work for wages in the fields in certain areas. Farmers, on the other hand, also seem to prefer women as agricultural workers. The farmer is faced with the increasing costs of production required for modern agriculture. He finds that he can squeeze his labour costs by using lower-paid women workers. Similarly, the work of women within family-based agriculture is preferred because it is cheaper than hiring labour. Women agricultural workers, although they represent a big proportion of all women workers, continue to receive lower wages than men. The Ministry of labour puts the difference at 60 per cent of men's wages, while the Indian Labour journal showed that women received 75 per cent of men earnings.

Table 1: Female Work participation in India 1961-2011

| Census Year | India Female |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1961 | 27.9 |
| 1971 | 14.2 |
| 1981 | 19.7 |
| 1991 | 22.7 |
| 2001 | 25.7 |
| 2011 | 25.5 |

Source: Census 2011 data, Office of the Registrar General, India.

Female work participation rate in India has been much lower than the male work participation rate. From table 1, it can be observed that the female work participation rate in India has drastically declined from 27.9 percent in 1961 to 25.5 percent in 2011. This means that the female work participation in 2011 has been than half the rate in beginning of the century, although there were ups and downs in various years. Moreover, the average time spends by farmwomen in household and agricultural activities (Table 2). In the peak season an active farmwoman spends five to nine hours per day on the farm. Agriculture and allied activities almost take the equal time and energy at par with household activities.

Table 2: Share of Farm Women in Agricultural Operations

| Activity | Involvement (Percentage) |
|---|--------------------------|
| Land preparation | 32 |
| Seed cleaning and sowing | 80 |
| Inter cultivation activities | 86 |
| Harvesting reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning and storage | 84 |

Source: Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 2001

In spite of their immense contribution in agriculture, women were severely deprived in wage of various agricultural activities. Table 3 shows the average wage earning received per day by casual labours by sex in Agriculture Sector. Gender disparity is clearly reflected in table 2 and 3. Women are paid the most unequally in India, compared to men, when it comes to hourly wages for labour. On average, women are paid 34 per cent less than men. This gap in wages, known as the gender wage gap. The trend holds true globally as well, but with lower levels of inequality among the sexes, where on average, hourly wages of women are 16 per cent less than those of men. Inequality is higher in monthly wages, with a

gap of 22 per cent. Overall, real wages grew just 1.8 per cent globally (136 countries) in 2017.

Table 3: Average Wage Earning Received per day in different agricultural operations

| Type of Operation | Female | Male |
|---|--------|-------|
| (a) Manual Work in Cultivation | 38.06 | 48.14 |
| Ploughing | 27.91 | 39.09 |
| Sowing | 32.73 | 41.81 |
| Transplanting | 28.37 | 38.78 |
| Weeding | 29.22 | 39.15 |
| Harvesting | 25.74 | 34.68 |
| Other Cultivation activities | 29.24 | 39.21 |
| (b) Manual Work in other | 27.65 | 39.27 |
| Agricultural | 30.65 | 44.84 |
| Activities | 33.34 | 46.45 |
| Forestry | 41.30 | 61.59 |
| Plantation | 21.88 | 28.14 |
| Animal Husbandry | 55.73 | 57.74 |
| Fisheries | 27.96 | 42.64 |
| Other Agriculture activities | 27.34 | 42.31 |
| (c) Non-Manual work in cultivation | 34.98 | 56.49 |
| (d) Non manual work in activities other than Cultivation. | 29.01 | 44.84 |

Source: Men and Women in India (Census Report 2011).

Conclusion

The study concludes that the female work participation rate has drastically declined from 27.9 percent in 1961 to 25.5 percent in 2011. This means that the female workers are moved from agricultural activities to non- agricultural activities. Besides, labourer is a wage differences for the same type of between male and female workers which discourages the female workers to involve in agriculture. Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labour market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labour market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labour market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labour market. Women's labour power is considered inferior because of employers predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labour, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labour market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual, and lacks potential upward mobility. For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields and reducing the gender issues, these are the following recommendations-(a) Recognition of labour work of working women in the rural economy may be accounted in monetary terms, b) More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension

services, c) Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building, d) Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose e) Women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society. Finally it is concluded that the rural women are exploited by land lords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub- servant or personal property. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

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